

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ASMARA 00348 181530Z

73

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

IO-10 SY-05 OPR-02 SSO-00 /080 W

----- 102597

R 181451Z MAR 75

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3277

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

CINCUSNAVEUR

COMNAVTELCOM

USCINCEUR

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

DIRNSA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0348

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS ET

SUBJ: MILITARY SITUATION IN ERITREA

1. DURING BRIEF UNEXPECTED AIRPORT ENCOUNTER TODAY WITH BG GETACHEW NADEW, ERITREAN MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, BG H.D. YOW, CHMAAG ADDIS, WHO VISITED ASMARA BRIEFLY ON MAAG AIRCRAFT, AND I HAD OPPORTUNITY QUERY GETACHEW ON CURRENT CONDITIONS HERE. GETACHEW HAD BEEN SCHEDULED DEPART FOR ADDIS YESTERDAY BUT DELAYED HIS DEPARTURE UNTIL RETURN, AFTER WEEK-LONG CONSULATION IN ADDIS, OF BG WORKU MAKKONEN, OIC 2ND DIV.

2. GETACHEW ASSERTED THAT MILITARY ACTIVITY NOW RELATIVELY LIGHT, ETH ARMY HAVING PUSHED INSURGENTS AWAY FROM POSITIONS AROUND ASMARA. HE ASSERTED, SURPRISINGLY, THAT SOME OF THE "BANDITS" POSITIONS NEAR ASMARA INCLUDED CONCRETE EMPLACEMENTS. HE SAID
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PAGE 02 ASMARA 00348 181530Z

ONE REASON HE GOING TO ADDIS IS TO DEVELOP PLANS FOR

RESTORING SOME SORT OF NORMAL LIFE TO ASMARA AND ERITREA. AMONG OTHER MEASURES ARE GUARANTEES OF SAFETY TO FOREIGN ENTREPRENEURS, PRINCIPALLY ITALIANS, IF THEY RETURN TO ASMARA. COMMENT: SOME ITALIAN BUSINESSMEN ARE KNOWN TO HAVE RETURNED LAST WEEK. END COMMENT.

3. WHEN I ASKED GETACHEW WHETHER ANY NEGOTIATIONS UNDERWAY, HE STIFFENED SLIGHTLY AND OBSERVED THAT AS "BANDITS" NOW ON THE RUN, IT UP TO THEM TO ASK FOR TALKS. HE ALSO STATED THAT SUPPLY OF FUEL AND FOOD TO ASMARA IS NOW SECURE.

4. IN SUBSEQUENT SCHEDULED MEETING WITH BG WORKU AT HIS OFFICE ON TRACT E, WHICH INCLUDED BG YOW, COL. E. FISK, CHIEF ARMY SEC. MAAG ADDIS, AND LT COL L.K. ALEXANDER, SENIOR MAAG ADVISOR, ASMARA, AND MYSELF, WORKU SUPPORTED GETACHEW'S STATEMENTS TO EFFECT THAT MILITARY ACTIVITIES NOW ON GREATLY REDUCED SCALE. HE SAID MAIN PROBLEMS NOW FOR THE ARMY ARE AMBUSHES BY "BANDITS" ALONG ALL MAIN ROADS OUT OF ASMARA. NEITHER KEREN, NOR ANY OTHER TOWNS ARE INVESTED, HE SAID. HE DENIED THAT "BANDITS" HAD DEVELOPED ANY CONCRETE EMPLACEMENTS. HOWEVER, DROPPING FOR THE MOMENT, THE ETH MILITARY INSISTANCE ON THE TERM "BANDIT", HE SOBERLY ESTIMATED THE COMBINED ELF/PLF STRENGTH AT 5,000 TO 7,000. HE SAID THE TWO INSURGENT FACTIONS ARE NOW WORKING BETTER TOGETHER BUT THE PLF ARE THE BETTER FIGHTERS AND ARE BETTER EQUIPPED. HE SAID THE "BANDITS" NOW HAVE SOME COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT AND ARE BETTER ABLE TO CONCERT THEIR ACTIVITIES. THE ETH NAVY IS TRYING TO INTERDICT THE INSURGENT SUPPLY ROUTES ALONG THE SEA COAST OF ERITREA AND THE DAHLAC ISLANDS, BUT ARMS SHIPMENTS DO COME IN AT NIGHT. HE SAID ARMY COORDINATION WITH THE NAVY IN MASSAWA IS POOR NOW, BUT HE HOPES THAT THE NEW JOINT HQ. WILL BE ABLE TO IMPROVE LIASION.

4. WHILE ADMITTING HIS TROOPS HAD INADEQUATE TRAINING IN COUNTER-AMBUSH AND OTHER COUNTER-INSURGENCY TACTICS, WORKU APPEARED CONFIDENT THAT HIS TROOPS CAN WITHSTAND ATTEMPTED INTERDICTION OF ROADS BY THE INSURGENTS, ENSURE THE ROADS REMAIN OPEN, AND RETAIN CONTROL OF ASMARA.

5. COMMENT: GETACHEW AND WORKU APPEAR GRIMLY DETERMINED NOT MERELY
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PAGE 03 ASMARA 00348 181530Z

TO CONTAIN, BUT TO DEFEAT THE INSURGENCY. WORKU, IN FACT, STATED THAT "HIS OBJECTIVE IS TO ELIMINATE THE "BANDITS." HE IS NOT INTERESTED IN WINNING THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE PEOPLE. MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS ARE PROBABLY A LONG WAY OFF, AS THE INSURGENTS, ACCORDING TO LOCAL SOURCES, SEEM JUST AS DETERMINED. PEACE IN ERITREA WILL NOT COME SOON.
SHERRY

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, COMBAT OPERATIONS, LIBERATION FRONTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975ASMARA00348
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750094-1004
From: ASMARA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750342/aaaablmx.tel
Line Count: 114
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 JUL 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <05 NOV 2003 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MILITARY SITUATION IN ERITREA
TAGS: PINS, ET
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006